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# 82 IN PUEBLO CREW FREED; U.S. GIVES NORTH KOREANS 'CONFESSION,' DISAVOWS IT

## U.S. General Repudiates Document Before Signing

By PETER GROSE  
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Dec. 22—The United States Government has deliberately signed what it termed a false confession of espionage inside North Korea territorial waters in order to free the Pueblo crew. The confession was repudiated as it was formalized by Maj. Gen. Gilbert H. Woodward, chief United States negotiator in the Pueblo talks.

The extraordinary action was

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authorized by President Johnson, United States officials said.

Secretary of State Dean Rusk said tonight that lengthy negotiations had turned up no other way, acceptable to both North Korea and the United States, of liberating the 82 surviving prisoners of the United States intelligence vessel, which was seized last Jan. 23.

"I know of no precedent in my 19 years of public service," Mr. Rusk said in a statement announcing the handing over of the prisoners to American representatives at the truce camp at Panmunjon.

"Apparently the North Koreans believe there is propaganda value even in a worthless document which General Woodward publicly labeled false before he signed it," Mr. Rusk said.

State Department officials could not cite any previous case in international law in

The document signed by General Woodward admitted that the Pueblo had illegally intruded into North Korean territorial waters and apologized for the intrusion. It acknowledged the validity of confessions made by the crewmen in captivity, and it gave firm assurances that no United States ship would ever again violate North Korean waters.

These were precisely the declarations that North Korea had demanded since the secret electronic monitoring vessel was boarded and captured in the Sea of Japan. In fact, the statement was prepared by the North Koreans and was not altered in any way by the American side, State Department officials said.

Throughout the negotiations the United States insisted that there was no evidence of an intrusion into North Korean waters and that the confessions broadcast by Communist radio stations could not be accepted as valid.

"After 10 months of negotiations, during which we made every sort of reasonable offer—all of which were harshly rejected—we had to come squarely up against a most painful problem: how to obtain the release of the crew without having this Government seem to attest to statements which simply are not true," Mr. Rusk said.

"Then, within the past week, a way which does just that was found, and a strange procedure was accepted by the North Koreans."

newsmen, in advance of signing the document and receiving custody of the crew, the State Department said. The North Koreans, the Department said, fully understood what General Woodward was planning to do and agreed to it.

"If you ask me why these two contradictory statements proved to be the key to effect the release of our men," Mr. Rusk added, "the North Koreans would have to explain it. The simple fact is that, the men are free and our position on the facts of the case is unchanged."

### President Gratified

The White House issued a statement by President Johnson expressing his gratification at the crew's release after a "totally unjustified detention."

"They should be reunited with their families in time for Christmas, and I am happy for them that their time of ordeal ends on a note of joy," the President said.

Secretary of Defense Clark M. Clifford issued a similar statement and added, "at the same time our thoughts and our prayers are extended tonight to those courageous American families whose men are yet in enemy prison camps."

### Reds Approved Disclaimer

The officials here said that the text of General Woodward's disclaimer was worked out in Washington and submitted in advance to the North Korean negotiators. The disclaimer expressed the continuing United States contention "that the ship was not engaged in illegal activity, that there is no convincing evidence that the ship at any time intruded into the territorial waters claimed by North Korea, and that we could not apologize for actions which we did not believe took place."

"The document which I am going to sign was prepared by the North Koreans, and is at variance with the above position," General Woodward went on, "but my signature will not and cannot alter the facts. I will sign the document to free the crew and only to free the crew."

The idea for the confession

released by Dec. 23, it would be withdrawn and the North Koreans would have to start negotiating from the beginning with the administration of President-elect Richard M. Nixon.

The propaganda aspect and the threat to withdraw the offer were cited as possible explanations for North Korea's agreement even though there was an alternative United States proposal that officials here had thought would be more advantageous to the Communists.

This would have been a technical device, which has been used from time to time in diplomatic deadlocks. Under the alternative proposal, General Woodward would have accepted the piece of paper on which the confession was printed, and written across it in his own handwriting an acknowledgment that he had taken custody of the prisoners.

Thus, he would have "signed" the paper, without accepting the terms of the confession, and the crew would have been freed. There would not have been the simultaneous statement by the United States that the confession was false and worthless.

### Charges Illegal Detention

Emphasizing the American disclaimer, the State Department spokesman, Robert J. McCloskey, made a further statement as soon as the prisoners had been freed. The crewmen, he said, were illegally seized and have been illegally held as hostages by the North Koreans for almost exactly eleven months.

"The prior acceptance by the North Koreans of the statement which General Woodward read into the record just before signing shows clearly their recognition of our position that the facts of the case call for neither an admission of guilt nor for an apology," he added.

From almost the start of the tedious negotiations with North Korea, the United States put higher priority on retrieving the men than the ship.

### THE JOHNSON STATEMENT

WASHINGTON, Dec. 22 (AP)—Following is the text of a statement issued by President Johnson tonight on the release of the crew of the Pueblo by North Korea:

I am deeply gratified that after a long 11 months of totally unjustified detention by the North Koreans, the crew of the U.S.S. Pueblo have been freed. They should be reunited with their families in time for Christmas, and I am happy for them that their time of ordeal ends on a note of joy.

put to the North Koreans at the meeting in Panmunjom on Dec. 17 and accepted two days later.

The officials conceded that they were surprised that the idea was acceptable. But they noted that there would be considerable propaganda value to the signed confession in the Communist world, where news media are officially controlled and need not take notice of the simultaneous disclaimer.

#### Threatened Withdrawal

At the Dec. 17 meeting it was reported, the United States negotiators said that if the proposal were not accepted in time for the prisoners to be these relatives while their husbands, fathers and sons were held by the North Koreans.

The negotiations at Panmunjom were cruelly drawn out, and I am grateful for the understanding which the Pueblo families showed through the long and painful period during which their Government has sought to free the crew.

I must express my deep sorrow over the death of one crew member, Seaman Duane D. Hodges, who was killed while endeavoring to carry out his duties during the seizure of the ship.

I also want to thank our negotiator at Panmunjom, Maj. Gen. Gilbert H. Woodward. He carried out his difficult and successful assignment with distinction and has preserved the integrity of the United States while obtaining the release of the men of the Pueblo.